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ARCHAEOLOGY AND PROTESTANT PRESUPPOSITIONS IN THE STUDY OF INDIAN BUDDHISM

The way in which the history of Indian Buddhism has been studied by modern scholars is decidedly peculiar. What is perhaps even more peculiar, though, is that it has rarely been seen to be so. This peculiarity is most readily apparent in what appears at first sight to be a curious and unargued preference for a certain kind of source material. This curious preference, although it may not be by any means uniquely characteristic of the study of Indian Buddhism, is particularly evident there; so too is the fact that it has no obvious scholarly justification. We might first look at a small sample of statements expressing this preference and at its consequences. Then we must at least ask what can possibly lie behind it.

When Europeans first began to study Indian Buddhism systematically there were already two bodies of data available to them, and the same is true today. There was, and is, a large body of archaeological and epigraphical material, material which can be reasonably well located in time and space,[1] material that is largely "unedited" and much

[1] There is, of course, no single, systematic survey of Buddhist archaeological remains in India. The best attempt so far is D. Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments* (Calcutta, 1971). It, however, was not only not intended to be exhaustive but is now also almost twenty years out of date. For inscriptional remains we have, for the period up to 1910, H. Lüders, *A List of Brahmi Inscriptions from the Earliest Times to about* A.D. *400 with the Exception of Those of Aśoka,* Appendix to Epigraphia Indica, 10 (Calcutta, 1912). It is, though, by

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of which was never intended to be "read."[2] This material records or reflects at least a part of what Buddhists—both laypeople and monks—actually practiced and believed.[3] There was, and is, an equally large body of literary material, material that in most cases cannot actually be

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now badly outdated and, as its title indicates, does not list material beyond "about A.D. 400." Both more comprehensive and much more recent is Shizutani Masao, *Indo bukkyô himei mokuroku* (Catalog of Indian Buddhist inscriptions) (Kyoto, 1979), but it too is already dated and contains serious omissions—cf. Shizutani's listings of the Kharoṣṭhî inscriptions, e.g., with that in G. Fussman, "Gândhârî écrite, gândhârî parlée," in *Dialectes dans les littératures indo-aryennes,* ed. C. Caillat (Paris, 1989), pp. 444–51. Shizutani is especially unreliable now for important sites like Amâravatî (none of the early inscriptions brought to light in the "clearance-operation" in 1958–59, e.g., are included; see A. Ghosh, "The Early Phase of the Stupa at Amaravati, South-east India," *Ancient Ceylon* 3 [1979]: 97–103; etc.) and like Mathurâ (only one of the finds from Govindnagar is included).

2 On the curious fact, e.g., that a considerable number of Buddhist inscriptions were never intended to be seen, let alone read, see H. Lüders, "The Manikiala Inscription," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1909), p. 660; S. Konow, *Kharoshṭhî Inscriptions with the Exception of Those of Aśoka,* Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, vol. 2, pt. 1 (Calcutta, 1929), p. 31; A. V. Naik, "Inscriptions of the Deccan: An Epigraphical Survey (*circa* 300 B.C.–1300 A.D.)," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 11 (1948): 3–4, etc.

3 This point in regard to archaeological evidence in general has been made a number of times. See, e.g., R. Grenet, *Les pratiques funeraires dans l'asie centrale sedentaire de la conquete grecque à l'islamisation* (Paris, 1984), p. 7, who, in referring to Zoroastrianism, contrasts "canonical or clerical texts—always untiringly scrutinized although the narrowness of the milieux which produced them is ever more clearly evident," with archaeological materials "which allow us the most direct access to the religion as it was lived and practised by all social classes." Much the same has also been said of epigraphical sources. L. H. Kant, in speaking of Jewish inscriptions from the Greco-Roman world, e.g., says "inscriptions, in contrast to most other written records, reflect a broad spectrum of society—from nearly illiterate poor, who wrote many of the Roman catacomb inscriptions, to the apparently wealthy patrons of funerary poetry and from tradesmen such as shoemakers and perfume sellers to educated persons such as rabbis and disciples of sages. It is also striking that, unlike many written texts, the inscriptions express for us religious views that have not been filtered by a subsequent normative literary tradition" ("Jewish Inscriptions in Greek and Latin," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms in Spiegel der Neueren Forschung,* Teil 2, *Principat,* Band 20, Halbband 2, ed. W. Haase [Berlin, 1987], p. 674). Likewise, in regard to "les inscriptions latines chrétiennes," Sanders has said: "De la sorte, les inscriptions nous renseignent aussi de manière privilégiée sur la masse, sur la majorité oubliée par la littérature à hauts talons, le majorité silencieuse, l'homme de la rue, sa vie privée, son imbrication dans son monde à lui, telle qu'elle fut définie par les coordonnées du temps, de l'espace, des conditions sociales, du climat religieux et émotionnel" (G. Sanders, "Les chrétiens face à l'épigraphie funéraire latine," in *Assimilation et résistance à la culture gréco-romaine dans le monde ancien: Travaux du VI^e^ congrès international d'études classiques,* ed. D. M. Pippidi [Paris, 1976], p. 285). For the points of view represented in Indian Buddhist inscriptions and the role of the "lettré," whether "moine ou sculpteur," see the important remarks in G. Fussman's review of *Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit,* by Th. Damsteegt, *Journal asiatique* (1980), pp. 423–24. It should be noted, finally, that inscriptions are, of course, written sources, but they are most easily and clearly distinguishable from literary sources by the simple fact that they were not meant to be circulated.

dated[4] and that survives only in very recent manuscript traditions,[5] material that has been heavily edited,[6] is "canonical" or "sacred," and was intended—at the very least—to inculcate an ideal.[7] This material records what a small atypical part of the Buddhist community wanted that community to believe or practice. Both bodies of material, it is important to note, became available to Western scholars more or less simultaneously.[8] The choice of sources for the scholar interested in knowing what Indian Buddhism had been would seem obvious. But the choice made was, apparently, not based on an assessment of the two kinds of sources as historical witnesses, but on some other kind of

4 For some representative recent views, see K. R. Norman, "The Value of the Pali Tradition," *Jagajjyoti Buddha Jayanti Annual* (Calcutta, 1984), pp. 1–9 (who points out that it is now known that "the Pali canon is a translation from some earlier tradition" [p. 4], that, in fact, "all traditions which we possess have been translated at least once" [p. 5]); L. O. Gómez, "Buddhism in India," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade (London, 1987), pp. 352 ff. ("Textual sources are late, dating at the very least five hundred years after the death of the Buddha"); G. Schopen, "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1985): 9 ff.

5 This, ironically, is especially true for the so-called early literature. For Pâli, see O. von Hinüber, "Pâli Manuscripts of Canonical Texts from North Thailand—a Preliminary Report," *Journal of the Siam Society* 71 (1983): 75–88 ("most of the surviving [Pâli] manuscript material is hardly older then the late 18th century" [p. 78]); and the material cited in G. Schopen, "The Stûpa Cult and the Extant Pâli Vinaya," *Journal of the Pâli Text Society* 13 (1989): 94, n. 23. For central Asian Sanskrit material, see L. Sander, *Paläographisches zu den Sanskrithandschriften der Berliner Turfansammlung*, Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, Supplementband 8 (Wiesbaden, 1968), p. 51 ("Unter den in die Tausende gehenden, von den vier preussischen Expeditionen [1902–1914] im Norden Ostturkistans gefundenen fragmentarischen Sanskrithandschriften gibt es, soweit mir bekannt ist, nur sieben mit den charakteristischen Merkmalen der Kuṣâṇa-Brâhmî," and so on).

6 I. B. Horner, *Women under Primitive Buddhism* (London, 1930), p. xx: "Still another inherent difficulty in dealing with the Pâli texts arises from the various editions, glosses, and revisions which they have undergone at the hands of the monks"; etc.

7 A. K. Warder, e.g., starts his discussion of the Pâli Canon as a "historical record" by saying "the Buddhists . . . were ready to turn everything to account in developing and popularizing their ideas and in presenting a comprehensive 'world view,'" and ends it by saying: "The bias of the repeaters [of the canon] sometimes intrudes itself, often very clumsily" ("The Pali Canon and Its Commentaries as an Historical Record," in *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, ed. C. H. Philips [London, 1961], pp. 46–47).

8 For the history of the study of the archaeological and epigraphical material, see now D. K. Chakrabarti, *A History of Indian Archeology: From the Beginning to 1947* (New Delhi, 1988); there is also some interesting material for the earliest period in P. Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (Oxford, 1977); and some useful data in A. Imam, *Sir Alexander Cunningham and the Beginnings of Indian Archaeology* (Dacca, 1966). For the study of literary sources the most recent and reliable work is J. W. de Jong, *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America*, 2d rev. ed. (Delhi, 1987); see also H. de Lubac, *La recontre du bouddhisme et de l'occident* (Paris, 1952); R. Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, trans. G. Patterson-Black and V. Reinking (New York, 1984); W. Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany, N.Y., 1988).

an assumption. This assumption, it appears, more than anything else, has determined the status and use of archaeological and epigraphical sources in the study of Indian Buddhism, and this assumption, apparently, accounts for the fact that an overriding textual orientation was very early in place in Buddhist studies.

In discussing E. Burnouf—who died in 1852 and whom he calls "the brilliant founder of the study of Buddhism"—J. W. de Jong, himself the most recent historian of Buddhist studies, says: "Burnouf stressed the fact that Indian Buddhism had to be studied on the basis of the Sanskrit *texts* from Nepal and the Pali *texts* from Ceylon. . . . Burnouf was well aware of the fundamental importance of the study of *texts* for the history of Buddhism. His idea with regard to India at the time of the Buddha, the doctrine of the Buddha and its later development, the relation of Buddhism to caste, etc. which he develops in the *Introduction* are all based on a careful study of the *texts*."[9]

De Jong himself has made a number of statements which clearly indicate that the position he ascribes to Burnouf in the first half of the nineteenth century is very much his own position in the second half of the twentieth: "Each of these vehicles [the three main "divisions" of Buddhism] has produced a rich literature. Undoubtedly, this literature is the most important source of knowledge of Buddhism. Buddhist art, inscriptions and coins have supplied us with useful data, but generally they cannot be fully understood without the support given by the texts. Consequently, the study of Buddhism needs first of all to be concentrated on the texts."[10]

De Jong's statement is of interest both because it is recent and representative and because it makes explicit some of the assertions and assumptions that lie behind it. Notice first that de Jong gives a variant version of the all too common, simplistic view of archaeology as "the handmaiden of history."[11] But he goes even further: not only must archaeology be the handmaiden of literary sources, it and the evidence it brings forth can only be "fully understood" with "the support given by the texts"; not only must archaeology support and amplify the literary sources, it must also be supported and amplified by them,

9 J. W. de Jong, "The Study of Buddhism: Problems and Perspectives," in *Studies in Indo-Asian Art and Culture,* vol. 4, ed. P. Ratnam (New Delhi, 1975), p. 21, and *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America,* p. 20, my emphasis.

10 De Jong, "The Study of Buddhism," 4:14.

11 Archaeologists themselves have contributed heavily to the currency of this view (see G. Daniel, *A Short History of Archaeology* [London, 1981], p. 13; J. A. Alexander, "The Archaeological Recognition of Religion: The Examples of Islam in Africa and 'Urnfields' in Europe," in *Space, Hierarchy and Society,* ed. B. C. Burnham and J. Kingsbury, British Archaeological Reports, no. 559 [Oxford, 1979], p. 215; cf. D. P. Dymond, *Archaeology and History: A Plea for Reconciliation* [London, 1974]).

otherwise it has no real use. It cannot be an independent witness. It cannot, therefore, tell a different story.

But notice too that this position, which gives overriding primacy to textual sources, does not even consider the possibility that the texts we are to study to arrive at a knowledge of "Buddhism" may not even have been known to the vast majority of practicing Buddhists—both monk and lay. It is axiomatically assumed that they not only were known but were also important, not only were "read," but were also fully implemented in actual practice. But no evidence in support of these assumptions, or even arguments for them, is ever presented.[12]

Notice too that no mention is made of the fact that the vast majority of the textual sources involved are "scriptural," that is to say formal literary expressions of normative doctrine;[13] and notice, finally, that no thought is given to the fact that even the most artless formal narrative text has a purpose, and that in "scriptural" texts, especially in India, that purpose is almost never "historical" in our sense of the term.[14] In fact what this position wants to take as adequate reflections of historical reality appear to be neither nothing more nor less than carefully contrived ideal paradigms. This is particularly clear, for example, in regard to what these canonical texts say about "the monk." But in spite of this scholars of Indian Buddhism have taken canonical monastic rules and formal literary descriptions of the monastic ideal preserved in very late manuscripts and treated them as if they were accurate reflections of the religious life and career of actual practicing Buddhist

12 Epigraphical evidence, at least, does not support the idea that Buddhist literature was widely known in actual Buddhist communities, but in fact points in the opposite direction (see, most recently, G. Schopen, "A Verse from the Bhadracarîpraṇidhâna in a 10th Century Inscription Found at Nâlandâ," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 12, no. 1 [1989]: 149–57, and the sources cited in the notes there).

13 In speaking about "early Christian archaeology," G. F. Snyder refers to "three mistaken assumptions" about 'sacred' literature: "It is assumed the literature represents rather accurately the historical situation when actually it may have a tendentious purpose. . . . It is assumed the literature speaks *cum solo voce* when actually other voices have been ignored, repressed, or assimilated. . . . It is assumed the literature represents a reflective or literary level of popular religion whereas actually literature and practice often stand in tension with each other" (*Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* [Macon, Ga., 1985], p. 8). Snyder's formulation is, of course, suggestive of what has been assumed in Buddhist studies as well.

14 It is worth noting that even those South Asian Buddhist literary sources that have been taken to most closely approximate "historical" documents in our sense of the term were intended, by their authors or transmitters, to fulfill a very different function. The chapter colophons of the *Mahâvaṃsa*, e.g., uniformly say: Here ends such and such a chapter "in the Mahâvaṃsa, compiled for the faith and exhilaration of good men" (*sujanappasâdasaṃvegatthâya*) (W. Geiger, *Mahâvaṃsa* [London, 1908], pp. 11, 15, 20, etc.); see also the opening exhortatory verses in H. Oldenberg, *The Dîpavaṃsa: An Ancient Buddhist Historical Record* (London and Edinburgh, 1879), p. 13.

monks in early India. Such a procedure has, of course, placed archaeology and epigraphy in a very awkward position. If archaeology and epigraphy are to be in the service of a "history" based on written sources of this kind, then they are going to have to "support and amplify" something that very probably did not exist; they are going to have to sit quietly in the corner spinning cloth for the emperor's new clothes. That this is largely what has happened and continues to happen is again not difficult to document.

We might, as a simple example, cite a series of passages from a variety of scholars that address in one way or another the question of whether individual monks owned personal property—a question that is of considerable importance, since it bears on the character of Buddhist monasticism and because Buddhism has been presented as "the world-renouncing religion *par excellence.*"[15]

G. Bühler, in discussing the second or first century B.C.E. donative inscriptions from Sâñcî, said: "Proceeding to the inscriptions which mention donations made by monks and nuns, the first point, which must strike every reader, is their great number. . . . *As the Buddhist ascetics could not possess any property,* they must have obtained by begging the money required for making the rails and pillars. This was no doubt permissible, as the purpose was a pious one."[16] H. Lüders, in discussing the Bharhut donative inscriptions, which may slightly predate those from Sâñcî, said much the same thing: "It is perhaps striking to find monks and nuns making donations, *as they were forbidden to own any personal property* besides some ordinary requisites. Probably we have to suppose that they collected the money required for some pious purpose by begging it from their relatives and acquaintances."[17]

G. Fussman, in arguing that a "small jar" from Haḍḍa that had a Kharoṣṭhî inscription on it containing the name of a monk was not a gift made to that monk but rather "a funerary jar" intended to hold his ashes, said, in part: "Surtout il paraît surprenant que le don soit fait à un moine en particulier. *C'est contraire aux prescriptions du vinaya. . . .*

[15] So R. C. Zaehner in his foreword to P. Olivelle's *The Origin and Early Development of Buddhist Monasticism* (Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1974).

[16] G. Bühler, "Votive Inscriptions from the Sânchi Stûpas," *Epigraphia Indica* 2 (1894): 93, my emphasis; cf. J. Marshall, A. Foucher and N. G. Majumdar, *The Monuments of Sâñchî* (Delhi, 1940), 1:34 and n. 2.

[17] H. Lüders, *Bharhut Inscriptions,* Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, vol. 2, pt. 2, rev. E. Waldschmidt and M. A. Mehendale (Ootacamund, 1963), p. 2, my emphasis. Like Bühler before him, and in similar terms, Lüders points out that a comparison of Buddhist with Jain inscriptions makes it very difficult to avoid the fact that in Buddhist inscriptions the monks themselves appear as donors—they are not acting as organizers or agents of others: "The wording of the Bhârh[ut] inscriptions refers to the Buddhist clergyman in such a way, as if he himself had made the donation" (p. 2).

On peut donc penser que la jarre était destinée à l'inhumation du moines"—to which he adds in a note: "*En ce cas il n'y aurait pas violation des règles du vinaya.*"[18] J. Marshall, in commenting on one of the numerous hoards of coins found at the monastic site surrounding the Dharmarājikā at Taxila, said: "Probably the hollow block of kanjur was merely a secret hiding place where one of the monks hid his store of coins . . . the possession of money by a monk *was contrary, of course, to the rule of the Church,* but the many small hoards that have been found in monasteries of the early medieval period leave little room for doubt that by that time the rules had become more or less a dead letter."[19] Finally, W. Spink, in an overview of Ajaṇṭâ, said: "A number of inscriptions at Ajaṇṭâ also prove that some of the caves, and numerous separate images, were donated by the monks themselves. This is an interesting commentary on the changing of Buddhism in India, for it suggests that monks, far from having renounced all worldly goods, were sometimes men of considerable wealth. It is doubtful that Buddhabhadra, the chief donor of the elaborate cave 26—a man who proclaims himself the friend of kings—spent very much time humbly wandering from village to village with his begging bowl *as his predecessors in the early days of Buddhism certainly did.*"[20]

The point here is not whether individual monks or nuns did or did not possess private property—the evidence we have, from all periods, indicates that they did. The point is that every time epigraphers, archaeologists, or art historians encountered evidence that even suggested the possibility that monks or nuns owned personal property they first signaled their surprise—"it is perhaps striking," "above all it appears surprising"—and then immediately invoked either explicitly

18 G. Fussman, "Une inscription Kharoṣṭhî à Haḍḍa," *Bulletin de l'école française d'extrême orient* 56 (1969): 8–9, my emphasis.

19 J. Marshall, *Taxila: An Illustrated Account of Archaeological Excavations Carried out at Taxila under the Orders of the Government of India between the Years 1913 and 1934* (Cambridge, 1951), 1:240, my emphasis. Such hoards are in fact found in Buddhist monasteries that are very much earlier than "the early medieval period" (see R. B. D. R. Sahni, *Archaeological Remains and Excavations at Bairat* [Jaipur, 1937], pp. 21–22; D. B. Diskalkar, "Excavations at Kasrawad," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 25 [1949]: 12 ff.; etc.).

20 W. Spink, "Ajanta: A Brief History," in *Aspects of Indian Art: Papers Presented in a Symposium at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, October 1970,* ed. P. Pal (Leiden, 1972), p. 51, my emphasis. For yet other examples, see D. D. Kosambi, "Dhenukâkaṭa," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay* 30, no. 2 (1955): 52–53; R. A. L. H. Gunawardana, *Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Sri Lanka* (Tucson, 1979), pp. 81–86; N. A. Falk, "The Case of the Vanishing Nun: The Fruits of Ambivalence in Ancient Indian Buddhism," in *Unspoken Worlds: Women's Religious Lives in Non-Western Cultures,* ed. N. A. Falk and R. M. Gross (San Francisco, 1980), p. 223, n. 2; H. P. Ray, *Monastery and Guild: Commerce under the Sâtavahanas* (Delhi, 1986), p. 104.

or implicitly the rules in the canonical monastic codes against it to assert, in one way or another, that they were not really seeing what they saw. Either that, or they neutralized what they were seeing by attributing it to a "late change" or implied "decline" within the tradition. They all axiomatically assumed that the textual ideal either was or had been actually in operation, that if it said so in a text it must have been so in reality. There appears to be, however, no actual evidence that the textual ideal was ever fully or even partially implemented in actual practice; at least none is ever cited. And even though the mere existence of rules against it might suggest that monks did own personal property,[21] and even though it is clear that in the textual ideal itself the infraction of those rules was a "minor offence,"[22] and even though it is almost certain that in a strictly legal sense "the monk might retain the ownership of the property that he had abandoned,"[23] still all material evidence that monks did have personal property must be explained away: Bühler's "they must have obtained by begging," Lüders's "probably we have to suppose." This is an archaeology truly in the service of written sources, no matter how idealized the latter may be, an archaeology that will find itself forced to retire in the face of frequently indelicate situations. One example must suffice.

We know that Longhurst's monastery 1 at Nâgârjunakoṇḍa was the gift of a laywoman (*upâsikâ*) named Bodhiśrî, and that it was the property of "the Theravâdin teachers of Ceylon." These same "teachers" are further described in the epigraphy of Nâgârjunakoṇḍa as "skilled in the exegesis of both the letter and meaning of the ninefold instruction of the teacher and the preservers of the tradition of the holy lineage."[24] It is of some significance that it was in this monastery, belonging to this group, that Longhurst discovered in one of the cells "a large number of small lead coins of the usual South Indian type of about the second century A.D." But he also found, together with these coins, "a lump of

21 Compare M. Wassilieff, "Le bouddhisme dans son plein développement d'après les vinayas," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 34 (1896): 321: "pour le vie en communauté, même dans les autres religions, les règles établies ne peuvent sortir du cadre connu."

22 See, for the sake of convenience, C. S. Prebish, *Buddhist Monastic Discipline: The Sanskrit Prâtimokṣa Sûtras of the Mahâsâṃghikas and Mûlasarvâstivâdins* (University Park, Pa., 1975), pp. 13–14, 70–71; I. B. Horner, "The Pattern of the Nissaggiyas," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 16 (1940): 268–91; M. Wijayaratna, *Le moine bouddhiste selon les textes du Theravâda* (Paris, 1983), pp. 93–104.

23 R. Lingat, "Vinaya et droit laïque: Études sur les conflits de la loi religieuse et de la loi laïque dans l'indochine hinayaniste," *Bulletin de l'école française d'extrême orient* 37 (1937): 415–77, esp. 431 ff.; cf. H. Oldenberg, *Buddha: His Life, His Doctrine, His Order,* trans. W. Hoey (London, 1882), p. 355 and n.

24 J. Ph. Vogel, "Prakrit Inscriptions from a Buddhist Site at Nagarjunikonda," *Epigraphia Indica* 20 (1929–30): 22–23.

lead ore and an earthenware die for the manufacture of coins of this size and pattern." Longhurst says simply that this indicates "that the monks made their own coins."[25] No mention is made of the fact that the authority for minting coins in early India was vested in the state, or in guilds of traders or "moneyers" by the power of the state.[26] This would suggest either that the monk or monks who lived in monastery 1 at Nâgârjunakoṇḍa were involved in trading and commercial enterprises, and were empowered by the state to do so, or that they were involved in counterfeiting. It is difficult to say which possibility is the more likely, but either alternative is interesting for what it might say about the character of actual, historical Buddhist monasticism. Evidence for such activities is, moreover, by no means limited to Nâgârjunakoṇḍa.[27]

The question of ownership by Buddhist monks of private wealth is, of course, not the only question that has been handled in this curious way. Another important example we might look at concerns the so-called doctrine of karma.

There are hundreds of short, simple donative inscriptions on the railings surrounding the *stûpa*s at Sâñcî and Bharhut that have been assigned to the second or first century B.C.E. Almost every one of them says something like *vajigutasa danam,* "the gift of Vajiguta," or *ghosaye danam,* "the gift of Ghosa," or one or another of hundreds of names, frequently with a title added indicating the donor's religious or secular status. That is all. The intention of the donor, the reason behind the gift, is—with only one exception—simply never stated. Confronted with this situation Ét. Lamotte, in a book entitled *Histoire du bouddhisme indien,* a book that is *the* standard authority in the field, was able to say: "At this time the mentality remains strictly orthodox, that is to say it conforms to the spirit of the Buddha. By their charity, the generous donors [at Bharhut and Sâñcî] never hope to reach the level of Nirvâṇa, but simply intend to benefit from the five advantages of the

25 A. H. Longhurst, *The Buddhist Antiquities of Nagarjunakonda, Madras Presidency,* Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, no. 54 (Delhi, 1938), p. 10; cf. I. K. Sarma, "A Coin Mould-Piece from Nâgârjunakoṇḍa: New Light on the Silver Coinage of the Sâtavâhanas," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 16 (1973): 89–106, which deals with an even earlier mold from the site.

26 K. D. Bajpai, "Authority of Minting Coins in Ancient India," *Journal of the Numismatic Society of India* 25 (1963): 17–21; D. C. Sircar, "Note on Chinchani Plate of Krishna III," *Epigraphia Indica* 37 (1968): 277–78; etc.

27 Evidence for the manufacture of coins at Buddhist monastic sites is both early and widespread. For such evidence at Kasrawad, see Diskalkar (n. 19 above), p. 15; for Nâlandâ, B. Kumar, *Archaeology of Pataliputra and Nalanda* (Delhi, 1987), p. 212; and S. S. P. Sarasvati, *Coinage in Ancient India: A Numismatic Archaeochemical and Metallurgical Study of Ancient Indian Coins* (Delhi, 1986), 1:202 ff., and so on.

gift signaled by the *Aṅguttara* (III p. 38–41)."[28] Putting aside the fact that it is difficult to know how Lamotte knew exactly what "the spirit of the Buddha" was, still it is interesting to notice what happens here. The inscriptions themselves—again with one exception—say nothing about intention, nothing about the donors' "hope" or what they "intended." There is, moreover, no evidence that the *Aṅguttara* was ever known at either Bharhut or Sâñcî. But in spite of this Lamotte not only imputes to actual individuals very specific intentions where none are actually expressed, he also assigns these intentions to a very specific text, which he cannot, in fact, actually place at either site. This is at best a curious kind of history, a kind of history that—to put it most simply—seems to assume that "if it says so in a canonical text it must have been so in reality." It does not seem to matter, again, that there is no actual evidence that this "formal doctrine" was ever a part of actual Buddhist practice.[29]

But if this assumption is able to override the absence of evidence, it is also important to notice that it is also able to override the presence of contrary evidence. After ascribing to the donors at Bharhut and Sâñcî the very specific intention of "benefiting from the five advantages" described in the canonical *Aṅguttara,* Lamotte goes on to say: "There can be no question [at Bharhut and Sâñcî] of transferring the merit [of their gift] to someone else, nor moreover of formulating intentions which the mechanism of the retribution of acts would render inoperative."[30] Notice again that there can be no question either of transferring the merit or even of formulating a particular intention because—by

28 Ét. Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien: Des origines à l'ère śaka* (Louvain, 1958), p. 456. (I have elsewhere discussed this same passage from a somewhat different point of view; see my "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism" [n. 4 above], pp. 44–46.)

29 There has been very little discussion of the assumptions and method that lie behind this important book. The only serious attempt to get at some of the problems involved is, as far as I know, M. Pye, "Comparative Hermeneutics in Religion," in *The Cardinal Meaning: Essays in Comparative Hermeneutics, Buddhism and Christianity,* ed. M. Pye and R. Morgan (The Hague, 1973), pp. 1–58, esp. 31 ff. At least some of the problems, moreover, appear to be directly related to Lamotte's declared intentions, which, on the surface, appear to be mutually contradictory. He first says, "Notre premier souci a été de replacer le bouddhisme dans le cadre historique qui lui manquait, de le retirer du monde des idées où il se confinait volontairement pour le ramener sur terre"; but then says: "En laissant au merveilleux la place qu'il a toujours occupée dans les sources, on pense donner un reflet plus fidèle de la mentalité des disciples du Buddha. C'est cette mentalité qui constitue l'objet propre de notre enquête et non une fuyante et insaisissable certitude historique" (Lamotte, pp. vi, x). Note that H. Durt has already pointed out that "certes, *l'Histoire du bouddhisme indien* n'est pas une 'histoire des mentalités' au sens contemporain du terme" ("Étienne Lamotte, 1903–1983," *Bulletin de l'école française d'extrême orient* 74 [1985]: 14).

30 Lamotte, p. 456.

implication—the mechanism of the retribution of acts would render both inoperative: that is to say, real donors—actual people—could only intend or want what was in conformity with a textual doctrine. There are, of course, a number of problems here, not the least of which is that it has never been established that the strict doctrine of retribution of acts was ever actually recognized outside of texts; it has never been established that it had any impact on actual behavior. In fact what we know from contemporary anthropological studies of both Buddhist and Hindu communities where this "doctrine" is "officially" recognized suggests otherwise. It suggests that where the doctrine is known at all it is generally invoked in very limited and specific contexts, and behavior and its motivations are largely governed by other ideas or forms of a doctrine of karma that differ, sometimes very markedly, from the classical, textual doctrine.[31] Moreover, epigraphical data suggest that this has always been the case. This, oddly enough, is clear even at Bharhut and Sâñcî, the sites Lamotte is specifically referring to.

As we have seen, the vast majority of donors at both sites do not record their intentions. There is only one exception. But in the one case in which the donor actually states his own intention that intention is exactly what Lamotte says is impossible—it is exactly what the textual doctrine of the retribution of acts would render inoperative. However, Sagharakhita—the donor in question—does not seem to know that. He makes his gift *mâtâpituna aṭhâyâ,* "for the benefit of his mother and father."[32] This in fact is one of the earliest and *the* only actually attestable form of the actual—as opposed to the ideal—Buddhist "doctrine" of karma and giving current at Bharhut and Sâñcî. But because it does not conform to and confirm the existence of the "textual" doctrine it is said that "it cannot possibly be." Textuality overrides actuality. And actuality—as expressed by epigraphical and

[31] Even the most steadfastly conservative have had to admit this in regard to contemporary Buddhism. See, e.g., R. F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Oxford, 1971), p. 243: "The canonical theory of *karma* survives intact—cognitively; affectively its rigour is sometimes avoided. Similarly, though the doctrine of *anatta* can be salvaged by the claim that the personality continuing through a series of births has as much reality as the personality within one life, *prârthanâ* for happy rebirths and the transfer of merit to dead relatives show that the *anatta* doctrine has no more affective immediacy with regard to the next life than with regard to this, and that belief in personal survival after death is a fundamental feature of Sinhalese Buddhism in practice." (Interestingly, something very like this had been pointed out more than a hundred years ago; see P. E. de Foucaux, *Le Lalitavistara: Devéloppement des jeux, contenant l'histoire du Bouddha Çakya-mouni, depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa prèdication* [Paris, 1884], I:xvi, n. 2, and xvii, nn. 1, 2.) For the Hindu context, see, among many possibilities, U. Sharma, "Theodicy and the Doctrine of Karma," *Man* 8 (1973): 347–64.

[32] Lüders, *Bharhut Inscriptions* (n. 17 above), p. 55 (A 108).

archaeological material—is denied independent validity as a witness. But it may not be altogether surprising to note that the more we come to know about what real donors actually did, the clearer it becomes how defective our textual sources can be as historical witnesses.

Since Lamotte wrote the remarks quoted above a number of important early inscriptions have come to light. In 1968 a number of donative inscriptions on what was a railing surrounding a *stûpa* were discovered at Pauni, in Maharashtra. In both style and paleography they are very similar to the inscriptions found at Bharhut and Sâñcî, and like them, have been assigned to the second or first century B.C.E. At Pauni, again as at Bharhut and Sâñcî, the majority of donors do not express their intentions, but there is at least one exception. This exception indicates that the donor, one Visamitâ, gave her gift "for the happiness of all beings" (". . . [yâ]ya visamitâya dâna sukhâya hotu savasâtâna").[33] The other early inscriptions that are of interest to us come from Sri Lanka and are almost certainly even earlier than those from Bharhut, Sâñcî, and Pauni. One of these inscriptions, which according to Paranavitana is one of "the earliest in Ceylon that can be definitely attributed to a particular ruler" and dates "to the period between 210 and 200 B.C.E., reads: "Gamaṇi-uti-maharajhaha[jhita abi-ti] śaya leṇe daśa-diśaśa sagaye dine mata-pitaśa aṭaya": "the cave of the princess (Abi) Tissa, daughter of the great king Gamani-Uttiya, is given to the Saṅgha of the ten directions, for the benefit of (her) mother and father."[34] In addition to this we now have four virtually identical inscriptions that record gifts of caves and that may even predate Abi Tissa's inscription. All four end by saying that the gift was given "aparimita-lokadatuya śatana śita-śukaye," "for the welfare and happiness of beings in the boundless universe."[35]

Known epigraphical evidence, therefore, proves that the earliest actually attestable Buddhist "doctrine" of karma and giving—and this is now attested from the third century B.C.E. and at very widely separated geographic sites—always involves exactly what Lamotte, on the basis of textual sources, said "could not possibly be the case." The intentions of actual donors at Bharhut, Pauni, and very early Sri Lanka, whenever they are actually expressed, indicate that they all

[33] V. B. Kolte, "Brahmi Inscriptions from Pauni," *Epigraphia Indica* 38 (1969): 174 (D); S. B. Deo and J. P. Joshi, *Pauni Excavations (1969–70)* (Nagpur, 1972), p. 38 (no. 2).

[34] S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon*, vol. 1, *Containing Cave Inscriptions from 3rd Century B.C. to 1st Century A.C. and Other Inscriptions in the Early Brahmi Script* (Ceylon, 1970), no. 34; see also pp. lii–liii.

[35] Ibid., vol. 1, nos. 338–41; see also pp. lii–liii.

wished in one sense or another "to transfer the merit to another"—to their parents, or to all beings, or to all beings " in the boundless universe." These same inscriptions give no indication that any other doctrine, textual or otherwise, was ever known at these sites.

A final example we might cite concerns the "disposal of the dead." Here the assigning of primary status to literary sources has not so much determined how the archaeological record should be "read." It has, rather, determined that it should not be read at all.

We know from the scholarly secondary literature on literary sources the precise views of several obscure monk-scholars on exactly "how many angels can dance on the head of an abhidharmic pin," and yet that same literature tells us nothing about how the Indian Buddhist community disposed of its dead. Even de la Vallée Poussin, in writing the entry entitled "Death and Disposal of the Dead (Buddhist)" for J. Hastings's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics,* was able to say almost nothing about "Disposal of the Dead" and filled the entry instead with scholastic definitions and descriptions of the process of death itself.[36] Again, the reasons for this are not difficult to determine. T. W. Rhys Davids says: "Nothing is known of any religious ceremony having been performed by the early Buddhists in India, whether the person deceased was a layman, or even a member of the Order. *The Vinaya Pitaka, which enters at so great length into all the details of the daily life of recluses, has no rules regarding the mode of treating the body of a deceased bhikkhu.*"[37] Rhys Davids, writing in 1900, makes it clear at least why nothing is known about the ritual disposal of the monastic dead: because the canonical literature known to him says nothing about it, the implication being, of course, that it therefore did not occur. But evidence that it did occur, that early Buddhist monastic communities were in fact preoccupied not only with disposing of their dead but with ritually and elaborately housing them as well had been published nearly fifty years before Rhys Davids and sixty before de la Vallée Poussin. But this was only material, physical evidence of what actually occurred—archaeological evidence—not canonical evidence.

Alexander Cunningham, as early as 1854, published the results of his cursory excavations of the central Indian monastic sites around Sâñcî. Here already was clear evidence that indicated the existence of an

[36] L. de la Vallée Poussin, "Death and Disposal of the Dead (Buddhist)," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics,* ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh, 1911), 4:446–49.

[37] T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Suttas,* Sacred Books of the East, vol. 11 (Oxford, 1900), pp. xliv–xlv, my emphasis.

extensive "cemetery" associated with the Buddhist monastic site at Bhojpur before the common era; here too at Sâñcî itself and at Sonari and Andher was clear evidence for the elaborate housing and worshiping of the remains of monastic dead.[38] What epigraphical material we have makes it clear that the construction and embellishing of the monumental reliquaries that contained these remains resulted from activity undertaken and paid for by a disproportionately large number of monks and nuns.[39] Only eight years later, in 1862, W. West published the first description of what he correctly identified as an extensive monastic cemetery, which formed a part of the Buddhist monastic complex at Kanheri on the western coast of India.[40] In 1883 J. Burgess published a description of what is clearly another monastic cemetery in the midst of the monastic cave complex at Bhaja.[41] All of this evidence was available to both Rhys Davids and de la Vallée Poussin, but for them, it seems, Indian Buddhism and Indian Buddhist practice were contained in canonical texts. What Indian Buddhists actually did was of no consequence. And since this was "true," Buddhist archaeology and epigraphy also were of no consequence.

It would appear, then, that the ascription of primacy to textual sources in Buddhist studies not only effectively neutralizes the independence of archaeological and epigraphical sources as witnesses, it also effectively excludes what practicing Buddhists did and believed from the history of their own religion. We can see something more of this in, for example, another statement of de Jong's: "Missionaries came into contact with Theravâda Buddhism in Ceylon, Burma, Siam, and Indochina and with different forms of Mahâyâna Buddhism in China and Japan. Their knowledge was based upon what they observed, and on discussions with Buddhist priests, but very rarely on the study of Buddhist literature itself. For these reasons it must have been

38 A. Cunningham, *The Bhilsa Topes: Or, Buddhist Monuments of Central India* (London, 1854), pp. 211–20 (Bhojpur—at which *stûpa* 8c, e.g., contained numerous large bones); pp. 184–89 (Sâñcî, *stûpa* no. 2); pp. 203–5 (Sonari, *stûpa* no. 2); pp. 223–26 (Andher, *stûpa*s nos. 2, 3).

39 This is beyond doubt, e.g., in regard to Sâñcî *stûpa* no. 2 (see Schopen, "The Stûpa Cult and the Extant Pâli Vinaya" [n. 5 above], p. 97 and n. 32), and M. Bénisti has recently argued that this *stûpa* is older even than Bharhut ("Observations concernant le stûpa n° 2 de Sâñcî," *Bulletin d'études indiennes* 4 [1986]: 165–70).

40 W. West, "Description of Some of the Kanheri Topes," *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 6 (1862): 116–20; see now S. Gokhale, "The Memorial Stûpa Gallery at Kanheri," in *Indian Epigraphy: Its Bearing on the History of Art,* ed. F. M. Asher and G. S. Gai (New Delhi, 1985), pp. 55–59; etc.

41 J. Burgess, *Report on the Buddhist Cave Temples and Their Inscriptions,* Archaeological Survey of Western India, 4 (London, 1883); see Mitra (n. 1 above), p. 153.

very difficult to gain a clear notion of the main Buddhist ideas. A religion like Buddhism which is based upon principles which are very different from the guiding principles of Christianity cannot be understood without a thorough study of its scriptures."[42]

Without wanting in any sense to defend "missionaries," still there are a number of statements here that one would like to unpack, although we can deal with only a few of the most important. Notice only that it is again clear that for this position Buddhism is based on "texts," that it can be really—do we dare to say "correctly"—understood only by a study of its "scripture." The implicit judgment, of course, is that real Buddhism is textual Buddhism. Notice that Buddhist "ideas"—at least "correct" Buddhist ideas—apparently do not reside in what Buddhists actually do or in what their "priests" say in conversation. Notice that knowledge based on observation of actual behavior is not adequate. But if actual religious behavior cannot tell us about religious "ideas" then this, again of necessity, has radical implications for the uses of archaeology and epigraphy: since archaeology and epigraphy tell us what people actually did they cannot tell us about "real" or "correct" religion. "Real" or "correct" religion, we are given to understand, and it is assumed, resides in scriptural texts, in formal doctrine.

It is, of course, precisely this curious assumption concerning the location of real religion that lies behind the equally curious history of the study of Indian Buddhism. But the fact that it is so firmly fixed in Buddhist studies, and was operational from the very beginning, and the fact that this is a discipline largely formed—if not fully founded—within the Western intellectual tradition, might well suggest that this assumption too is rooted there, and that it might occur elsewhere as well. And indeed it does. It is not only found in fact in a variety of similar disciplines, it is much more nakedly expressed in other fields. I can cite here only three examples.

Charles Thomas, one of the foremost figures in the archaeology of early Britain, starts his book entitled *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* with some important observations. He says:

> It would now be possible to build, slowly, a reliable framework for the Christian events of those centuries [the fifth to the sixth], using no more than archaeological, artistic and architectural data. . . . So much that we can today detect through the exercise of archaeological methods—the primacy of the Christian cemetery, the direct Mediterranean contacts, the introduction of full

42 De Jong, *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America* (n. 8 above), p. 11.

monasticism, and the interplay of art styles in different media—is nowhere explicitly described in what literature has survived. Conversely, much that *is* contained in literary guise alone is not, as yet, reflected in visible or tangible evidence from this period.[43]

These observations—all of which point toward the importance of archaeological remains as independent sources for the history of a religion—are, however, followed by an otherwise curious apologia:

The Christian reader may find many features of insular Christianity explained below in terms of pagan or prehistoric monuments. . . . This requires, perhaps, a short clarification. The central message of the New Testament, that redemption and the means of grace were provided for us, the priesthood of all believers, through God's assumption of manhood and his crucifixion in the person of Jesus Christ, remains untouched. It is a message conveyed by the Gospels, by patristic writing, and additionally through the means of symbols; these apart, it does not and cannot require any material reflection. On the other hand, the outward and visible form assumed by humanly constructed burials or burial-grounds, by the commemoration of dead humans by living humans, by the retention of skeletal fragments and like trivia as relics, and by the building of structures specially designed for the ceremonies of worship, are man's accretions in response to this message. As such, they are independent of the Word, and for the most part devoid of direct biblical authority. They are no more than the handiworks of what Professor Mircea Eliade has called "religious man." They are, moreover, the Christian versions of certain ideas . . . which prove, upon examination, to occur widely and commonly in the outward manifestations of most known religions both past and present.[44]

Thomas's statements, which come from a work of historical archaeology published in 1971 by Oxford University Press, provide us with a startling example of how the assumption as to where religion is located neutralizes the significance of material remains and, ipso facto, the role of human behavior in the history of a religion. Thomas makes it very clear that because "they are independent of the Word, and for the most part devoid of direct biblical authority," the material remains that characterize the early *Christian* archaeology of North Britain—"the primacy of the *Christian* cemetery," etc.—cannot be, paradoxically, in any way essentially and historically Christian. In fact he hastens to assign them to some bloodless, ahistorical abstraction called "religious man" who seems to have behaved much the same everywhere and at all times. Virtually the same position—though made even more explicit—

43 C. Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (London, 1971), p. 1.
44 Ibid., pp. 3–4.

is maintained by G. F. Snyder in an even more recent work on "the archaeological evidence of church life before Constantine."

Snyder makes a number of moves that are similar to those of Thomas, though more neutral in their expression. He too seems anxious to make sure that "the central message of the New Testament . . . remains untouched," but he goes about it in a somewhat different way. "In this study," he says, "there is a resolve to use only archaeological data as derived from the early Christians themselves. For a study of the New Testament, there is no such possibility. It is a basic assumption of this study that there never will be such data available for the study of the New Testament period."[45] This, of course, rather effectively neutralizes the significance of any material remains that might turn up from early first century Capernaum, for example, for the simple reason that they could not be Christian.[46]

If this suggests to the disinterested reader that what early Christian people did or how they lived has nothing to do with the history of early Christianity, Snyder is quick to confirm this when he finally encounters material remains that are clearly "derived from the early Christians themselves" and therefore indicative of what they actually did: they are, in the end, also not allowed any significance for the history of Christianity.

Snyder first asserts that "the interpretive edge today rests with the Bonn School, which proposes to study early Christian remains contextually as a *Volkreligion.*" He then goes on to say: "If archaeological data belong to the realm of popular religious practice, the interpreter, or historian, must state clearly how the evidence of archaeology does relate to the literary material, or, to state it another way, how the popular religion relates to ecclesiastical tradition. The issue raised belongs not to the disciplines of patristics, history, or theology, but to the sociology of religion."[47]

The position here is as straightforwardly contradictory as was Thomas's. The historian must clearly relate the archaeological evidence to the literary material, but that relationship—"the issue raised"—does not belong to the discipline of history. Early Christian remains and

45 Snyder (n. 13 above), p. 10.

46 This same assumption also makes it impossible for archaeological investigation to critically comment on the nature of the New Testament as a historical document; cf. the remarks in E. M. Meyers and J. F. Strange, *Archaeology, Rabbis and Early Christianity* (Nashville, 1981), pp. 58–59, on the absence of a first-century synagogue at Capernaum in spite of the fact that Mark 1:21 places one there (for other problems concerning Capernaum in the New Testament, see J. Blenkinsopp, "The Literary Evidence," in V. Tzaferis, *Excavations at Capernaum, vol. 1, 1978–1982* [Winona Lake, Ind., 1989], pp. 201 ff.).

47 Snyder, pp. 7, 9.

archaeological data belong, according to Snyder, "to the realm of popular practices." They must represent then, at the very least, what early Christian people actually did. But, again according to Snyder, the relationship of what early Christian people actually did, or actually believed, to "the literary material" falls outside the purview of the historian of Christianity. Christianity, like Buddhism, apparently only exists in texts.

It is here also worth noting incidentally that, as Thomas's reference to Eliade suggests, the same assumption concerning religion and where it is located occurs in widely different kinds of work. The fact that a scholar like Eliade whose concerns differ widely from those of Thomas and Snyder also implicitly accepts this is only confirmation of how pervasive and perverse it has been.

Eliade, in speaking about "the customs and beliefs of European peasants," says:

> It is true that most of these rural European populations have been Christianized for over a thousand years. But they succeeded in incorporating into their Christianity a considerable part of their pre-Christian religious heritage, which was of immemorial antiquity. It would be wrong to suppose that for this reason European peasants are not Christians. But we must recognize that their religion is not confined to the historical forms of Christianity. . . . We may speak of a primordial, ahistorical Christianity; becoming Christian, the European cultivators incorporated into their new faith the cosmic religion that they had preserved from prehistoric times.[48]

Although there is much here that would require clarification, for our purposes it is sufficient to notice that like Thomas and Snyder—but toward a very different end—Eliade separates what Christians actually did or do, their "customs and beliefs," from "historical forms of Christianity." What European Christian peasants do or believe is excluded from the history of their own religion and is assigned to something called "ahistorical Christianity." Once again the implications are clear: "the historical forms of Christianity"—whatever they are, and that is assumed to be self-evident—have little to do with actual Christians.

It is a curious fact that these three scholars—Thomas, Snyder, and Eliade—although each is dealing with a different period, a different location, and different kinds of evidence, all end by doing the same thing: they all want to exclude in one way or another actual Christian behavior and belief from the history of Christianity. Thomas wants to

[48] M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego, Calif., 1959), p. 164.

assign it to generalized "religious man"; Snyder assigns it to "popular practice," the domain of the sociologist of religion; and Eliade attributes it to "immemorial antiquity" or "ahistorical Christianity." None of them will admit it into the history of Christianity, and this can only be because they all share a common conception of where "essential," "real," or true Christianity is located. For them it appears to reside in texts. It would appear, then, that Buddhist scholars, archaeologists of early Britain, and historians of religion are all working from the same assumption as to where religion is located. But, at least in its origin, this may not be an assumption at all.

Although most Buddhist scholars, archaeologists, or historians would probably resist the suggestion, this "assumption" in regard to the sources for the understanding of religions looks, on closer inspection, very much like it might itself be a religious or theological position. Embedded, for example, in apparently neutral archaeological and historical method might very well be a decidedly nonneutral and narrowly limited Protestant assumption as to where "religion" is actually located.[49]

The methodological position frequently taken by modern Buddhist scholars, archaeologists, and historians of religion looks, in fact, uncannily like the position taken by a variety of early Protestant "reformers" who were attempting to define and establish the locus of "true religion." The unknown author of the tract "On the Old and the New God" proposes, according to C. M. N. Eire, "that Christians

[49] "Protestant" is used here in the broadest and most general sense, and the assumption involved is probably only meaningfully so called in regard to its origins. It has, it seems, been so generalized and fully assimilated into Western intellectual and cultural values that in its present form it is probably most simply characterized as "Western." Elements of this assumption were, of course, much older. There was, to begin with, the "Second Commandment" and its long and convoluted history (see J. Gutmann, "The 'Second Commandment' and the Image in Judaism," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 32 [1961]: 161–74, and "Deuteronomy: Religious Reformation or Iconoclastic Revolution?" in *The Image and the Word: Confrontations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. J. Gutmann [Missoula, Mont., 1977], pp. 5–25). There was Vigilantius, of whom Saint Jerome, at least, was not fond (W. H. Fremantle, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, ser. 2, vol. 4 [Grand Rapids, Mich., 1983], pp. 417–23) and later the Iconoclastic controversies (see, among an immense bibliography, D. J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-Century Iconoclasm* [Toronto, 1986] and the select bibliography given there). There was Guibert of Nogent's *De Pignoribus sanctorum* (see K. Guth, *Guibert von Nogent und die hochmittelalterliche Kritik an der Reliquienverehrung* [Ottobeuren, 1970], but see also J. F. Benton's discussion of Guibert's character in *Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent* [New York, 1970], pp. 1–33), and even Erasmus (see *Ten Colloquies*, trans. C. R. Thompson [Indianapolis, 1979], pp. 56–91). But none of these in and of themselves had lasting cultural influence, and almost all are more significant in retrospect—that is to say, in the way in which they were perceived and used during and after the Reformation.

should not seek religion in outward things, but rather in scripture."[50] Karlstadt, again according to Eire, "began to strike out against the prevailing religious externalism of his day, hoping he would be able to reassert the primacy of the Word." His position "is clearly revealed in this dictum: only the Spirit vivifies, and the Spirit works through the Word, not through material objects. 'The Word of God is spiritual, and it alone is useful to believers.'"[51] Zwingli, in his *Commentary on True and False Religion,* declared that "we ought to be taught by the word of God externally, and by the spirit internally, those things that have to do with piety, and not by sculpture wrought by the artist's hands."[52] Calvin, too, saw material things—"images and like things"—not as integral and vital parts of "religion," but as "innumerable mockeries . . . which pervert religion" and must be excluded from it. They are not "spiritually ordained by the Word."[53]

There are other and probably better passages that could be cited, but the point at least, I think, is clear: there is a remarkable similarity between the value assigned literary sources in modern historical and archaeological studies and the argument of Protestant reformers concerning the location of "true religion." This suggests at least the distinct possibility that historical and archaeological method—if not the history of religions as a whole—represents the direct historical continuation of Reformation theological values and suggests that if Karlstadt's hope was to "reassert the primacy of the Word," he may have succeeded in doing just that in some very unlikely and unforeseen ways.

There are other considerations that point in the same direction. It is not just the assigning of primacy to literary materials in the study of religion in both modern archaeological and historical studies that shows several signs of possibly being rooted in sixteenth-century Protestant tracts. The concomitant disinclination to consider material remains as independent, critical sources for the history of a religion in both archaeology and historical studies also looks very much like a more recent manifestation of the sixteenth-century Protestant distrust and devaluation of actual religious and historical human behavior. Sixteenth-century material objects—reliquaries, shrines, and images—were for the "reformers" apparently irrefutable evidence for what Christian people were actually doing. They refer to them constantly in

50 C. M. N. Eire, *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 76.

51 Ibid., pp. 55, 59.

52 Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion,* ed. S. M. Jackson and C. N. Heller (Durham, N.C., 1981), pp. 331–32.

53 J. K. S. Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises,* Library of Christian Classics, vol. 22 (Philadelphia, 1954), p. 36 ("The Lausanne Articles," no. 7).

their polemics—Calvin, in fact, drew up "an inventory of relics" to show, from his point of view, just how bad things were.[54] This inventory, ironically, is an extremely valuable historical document because it allows us to see what was actually occurring during his lifetime in specific geographical locations. But what is a boon for us was a bane for Calvin. In fact the problem for the "reformers" was, in part at least, precisely what was actually occurring and what had been historically practiced. Given the nature of the case they were trying to advance they did not—more pointedly, could not—allow actual religious practice to have any meaningful place in defining the nature of "true religion." To have done so would have been to concede to their perceived opponents the validity of a substantial portion of the argument from "tradition." The proponents of this new and historically peculiar conception of religion therefore were of necessity systematically forced to devalue and denigrate what religious people actually did and to deny that it had any place in "true religion."[55] This devaluation not surprisingly, but in fact almost obsessively, focused on material objects. The religious power and importance of these objects are, however, only underlined by the fact that they frequently had to be forcefully removed and destroyed and always had to be fulsomely denounced with an otherwise curious ardor. We, it seems, may have inherited both: the unwillingness to allow actual practice a meaningful place in the definition of religion and the devaluation of any sources that express it.

Merely stating the striking similarity between the arguments of sixteenth-century Protestant reformers and the assumptions of modern Buddhist scholars, archaeologists, and historians of religion does not, of course, prove anything. It does, however, suggest some possibilities.

54 H. Beveridge, trans., *Tracts Relating to the Reformation by John Calvin* (Edinburgh, 1844), pp. 289–341 ("An Admonition, Showing the Advantages which Christendom might Derive from an Inventory of Relics").

55 This can be illustrated by a number of passages from the *Institutes* (J. Allen, *Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin,* 4th ed. [Philadelphia, 1843], vol. 2). In reference to the intercession of saints, 3.20.21: "Therefore, since the Scripture calls us away from all others to Christ alone . . . it would be a proof of great stupidity, not to say insanity, to be so desirous of procuring an admission by the saints, as to be seduced from him, without whom they have no access themselves. But that this has been practised in some ages, and is now practised wherever Popery prevails, who can deny?"; 4.9.14: "Of purgatory, the intercession of saints, auricular confession, and similar fooleries, the Scriptures contain not a single syllable. But, because all these things have been sanctioned by the authority of councils, or, to speak more correctly, have been admitted into the general belief and practice, therefore every one of them is to be taken for an interpretation of Scripture"—a position Calvin, of course, denies; 4.10.1: "Whatever edicts have been issued by men respecting the worship of God, independently of His word, it has been customary to call *human traditions.* Against such laws we contend."

It is possible that the curious history of the study of Indian Buddhism is not so curious, nor unique. It begins to appear as only one instance in which a particular assumption concerning the location of religion has dictated and determined the value assigned to various sources.[56] It is possible that what was in origin a sixteenth-century Protestant polemical conception of where "true" religion is located has been so thoroughly absorbed into the Western intellectual tradition that its polemical and theological origins have been forgotten and that it is now taken too often entirely as a given.[57] It is possible then, that it is

56 This, of course, is not to deny that other factors were involved. P. C. Almond, e.g., has recently discussed the textualization of Buddhism as an instrument of colonialist ideology, a "Victorian Buddhism . . . constructed from textual sources increasingly located in and therefore regulated by the West" (*The British Discovery of Buddhism* [Cambridge, 1988], pp. 24 ff.). A striking example of the effects of this textualization may be seen in S. Hardy, *A Manual of Buddhism in Its Modern Development,* 2d ed. (London, 1880), p. 412: "The difficulties attendant upon this peculiar dogma [the textual conception of *anatta*] may be seen in the fact that it is almost universally repudiated. Even the sramana priests, at one time, denied it; but when the passages teaching it were pointed out to them in their own sacred books, they were obliged to acknowledge that it is a tenet of their religion." See also L. Rocher, "Max Müller and the Veda," in *Mélanges Armand Abel,* ed. A. Destrée (Leiden, 1978), 3:221-35. That the textualization of Hinduism by Indian "reformers"—in imitation of the Protestant missionary model of religion—had the same consequences for the evaluation of Indian religious practice as the Protestant location of religion had had on the evaluation of European practice, at least at the intellectual level, is painfully clear form a number of sources. Râmmohan Roy said, e.g., "My constant reflections on the inconvenient, or rather injurious rites introduced by the peculiar practice of Hindoo idolatry which more than any other pagan worship, destroys the texture of society, together with compassion for my countrymen, have compelled me to use every possible effort to awaken them from their dream of error; and *by making them acquainted with their Scriptures,* enable them to contemplate with true devotion the unity and omnipresence of nature's God' (quoted in G. Richards, *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism* [London, 1985], p. 5, my emphasis; see also pp. 6-9, 24, 30-33, 45, 48-50, etc.) It is undoubtedly and notoriously difficult to separate the religious and the political in colonialist ideology, but since both were also at work in founding the Archaeological Survey of India (Imam [n. 8 above], pp. 40-41), the ideological concern could not itself have been a sufficient cause for the dominance of the textual orientation.

57 This, again, is not to say that there were not powerful competing conceptions, but only to say that they did not culturally win. Early on the "Catholic" conception held its own and produced as a consequence some important scholarly works: "Catholic scholars tended to anchor their investigation of Christian religious observance in ancient tradition. It was the study of this tradition that inspired the monumental and often reprinted *Annales Ecclesiastici* and the work on the Roman martyrs by Cesare Baronio, as well as Bosio's *Roma sotterranea,* the first major archaeological account of the Roman catacombs. On the other hand, when Protestants discussed the practice of Christian piety, they most often appealed to reason and to theological and philosophical principles. . . . In the words of John Calvin, a Christian should have 'no use [for] place apart from the doctrine of godliness' which could be taught anywhere at all" (S. MacCormack, "Loca Sancta: The Organization of Sacred Topography in Late Antiquity," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage,* ed. R. Ousterhout [Urbana, Ill., and Chicago, 1990], pp. 8-9). But recent scholarship, which has tended to see "the Counter-Reformation and the Protestant Reformation as analogous social and religious processes" (so Badone in her introduction

this conception that has determined the history of the study of Indian Buddhism and that—as a consequence—our picture of Indian Buddhism may reflect more of our own religious history and values than the history and values of Indian Buddhism. It is possible, finally, that the old and ongoing debate between archaeology and textual studies is not—as is frequently assumed—a debate about sources. It may rather be a debate about where religion as an object of investigation is to be located. It is possible, perhaps, that the reformation is not over after all.

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to *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society*, ed. E. Badone [Princeton, N.J., 1990], p. 12), has also pointed clearly to the strong textualizing responses in the former; so, J. Delumeau, in *La Catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire* (Paris, 1971): "De l'extraordinaire intérêt qu'on marqua pour les choses de la religion, au moins dans le public qui savait lire, témoignent les statistiques concernant l'édition . . . l'histoire religieuse et celle des mentalités ne peuvent négliger ce fait quantitatif: jamais autant le livres de spiritualité—souvent de petits formats et en langue vulgaire—, jamais autant d'éloges de la vierge n'avaient été mis en circulation" (p. 84); "Surtout, l'époque de l'humanisme vit l'essor de la théologie *positive* . . . qui est l'étude de l'Ecriture, aidée par les interprétations des Pères et des conciles" (p. 85); "En 1654, Godeau, évêque de Vence, donna dans ses mandements des listes de livres à lire à ses prêtres. En 1658 l'archevêque de Sens, Godrin, demanda à ses curés de se procurer 47 ouvrages qu'ils devaient, le cas échéant, présenter lors des visites pastorales et, parmi eux, une Bible, le catéchisme romain" (p. 271); cf., also, B. Baroni, *La contre-réforme devant la Bible: La question biblique* (Lausanne, 1943). Delumeau's remarks raise as well the question of the sheer influence of the development of printing on the location of religion in texts, and it undoubtedly played a role. But any argument contending that it in itself is a sufficient explanation must take into account the fact that printing served a very different function in the Far East—especially in the earlier periods. There sacred texts were printed not so they could be read, but so they could empower sacred objects. The earliest extant examples of printing in Japan, e.g., contain "versions of Sanskrit charms [*dhâraṇîs*] transliterated into Chinese characters," and, even if they had been seen, would have had little or no literal meaning for a literate Japanese. But they, in fact, were never intended to be seen. They were meant to be inserted into miniature *stûpas*" (see J. Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. 5, *Chemistry and Chemical Technology*, pt. 1, *Paper and Printing*, by Tsien Tsuen-hsuin [Cambridge, 1985], pp. 336–37; see also pp. 321–22).